

Courier

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Legislative planning

The Road to Richmond



Sue Mittereder, Tony Griffin and Gerald Connolly review the county's legislative plans.

Tucked into a corner of the county executive's office, a small group of staff is engrossed in its work on the county's legislative agenda. At the heart of the effort is the Board of Supervisors' Legislative Program for the upcoming Virginia General Assembly (GA) in Richmond. With the 2006 session beginning on Jan. 11, the pace of activity has quickened to a level of high intensity.

Importance of the General Assembly

As concerned citizens, many county employees follow with *See Road, page 2*

Speaking of Toastmasters...

Confidence and public speaking. At Toastmasters meetings, the two concepts are almost synonymous, for as the ability to speak before an audience improves, personal confidence goes up.

Toastmasters is an international organization that is designed to help members improve their communications skills. While a Web search indicates 418 Toastmasters clubs in the Northern

Virginia, Maryland and Washington, D.C. areas, there are four clubs in Fairfax County oriented to county employees. The county considers Toastmasters "a valuable training resource that helps enhance communications and leadership skills," and consequently pays for employee member's yearly dues.

Denis Hannan, DPWES, is president of *See Toastmasters, page 4*

Road, from page 1

interest the actions of the GA, during which legislators enact, amend and, at times, repeal state laws affecting the health, safety, and welfare of all Virginians. But employees have another reason for tracking these sessions. Since the commonwealth of Virginia is a "Dillon Rule" state, the outcomes often directly affect the manner in which they serve the public. With the stakes so high, the board has charged the Government Relations staff with developing, coordinating, and advocating the board's legislative agenda each year. "Due to the Dillon Rule, we have to fight to preserve the authority we have," said County Executive **Tony Griffin**. "Out of necessity, we're frequently forced to play defense in Richmond."

The Richmond Team

Government Relations (GR) is led by **Susan E. Mittereder**, Ed.D., the county's legislative director, a 23-year veteran of the General Assembly, who serves as the county's chief legislative advocate and coordinator of state and federal legislative activities. With a background in education law, policy analysis and finance, Mittereder also draws on her experience as an educator and former legislative liaison for Fairfax County Public Schools. She is assisted by Legislative Liaison **Claudia**

Arko, a new hire, whose years of Congressional work on Capitol Hill provide the experience to

coordinate the county's federal agenda, a recently added responsibility for GR.

Rounding out the team about to be deployed to Richmond are two other seasoned employees with expertise in land use and transportation, Deputy County Attorney **Karen J. Harwood** and Transportation Coordination and Funding Chief **Tom Biesiadny**. The county contracts with **Sue Rowland** to provide expertise on human services issues. Each is required by state law to

be registered with the secretary of the commonwealth.

During the session, Government Relations staff is based in Old City Hall in Richmond's Capitol Square. In 2006, they will reside in Richmond throughout the session, from Jan. 11 to March 11.

Typical days in Richmond begin with subcommittee meetings as early as 6:30 a.m. with a midday break for political party caucuses and House and Senate floor sessions, and resume in the early evening, sometimes running into the wee hours. The Richmond team covers 25 committees. Mittereder said, "The workload and the hours are challenging. We survive on humor, adrenaline, and chocolate — in no particular order!" In the crush of the legislative schedule, staff must seize any opportunity to speak with legislators. According to Mittereder, "You'll often have only the time it takes to walk with a legislator from the GA building to the Capitol Building to explain a complicated issue, so you learn to be very concise!"

The 2006 Legislative Program

Each year GR staff works with Fairfax County Board Chairman **Gerald E. Connolly**, the board and county departments to compile a legislative program which is adopted by the board. This year the program is particularly ambitious. County-initiated legislation for 2006 will include providing incentives to preserve affordable housing, addressing over-crowded housing, combating gang-related crime, and protecting teen drivers and their passengers. In addition, the region will try to regain authority for photo red light. Funding for transportation remains the county's number one priority. The need for more adequate funding from the commonwealth is a prevailing theme throughout the county's program. "Protecting and expanding county authority is a constant in our legislative initiatives," said Connolly.

The Fairfax Team

The Richmond team is ably assisted back in Fairfax by Legislative Assistant **Katie Boyle**, whose primary task is to coordinate the

See Road, page 3

The Dillon Rule
Virginia is a strict adherent to the Dillon Rule and its underlying principle, which holds that local governments should be limited to the powers conferred on them by their state governments.

2006 General Assembly

- ♦ Begins Jan. 11 (by law, second Wednesday in January), ends March 11.
- ♦ Cross-over date Feb. 14 (deadline for final action by originating chamber).
- ♦ Veto session April 19.
- ♦ Even-numbered years are 60-day sessions. Odd-numbered years are 45-day sessions.

Road, from page 2

multi-agency Legislative Review Team, commissioned by Griffin and tasked with reviewing and providing expert opinions on nearly 3,000 bills and resolutions. Also included in this team is **Evelyn Kiley**, a recent retiree from the county with extensive experience in policy work, and **Christina Franklin**, a former Fire Department employee and current graduate student at George Mason University.

The Legislative Review Team includes representatives from major county operating areas, and draws heavily from the Department of Management and Budget and the Office of the County Attorney. "The participation of county staff is critical to our work in Richmond," said Mittereder. "We are only as good as the information we get from agencies at home, and they have never let us down. Fairfax County has the most sophisticated operation for reviewing bills in the state, which has earned us a reputation statewide for providing a rapid response with reliable information." She notes that review team members have only a few weeks to read and provide comments on "a mountain" of bills, and that members take on this responsibility in addition to their regular county duties.

Weekly Work in Richmond.

When the Richmond team isn't reading bills or attending GA meetings, they are meeting with members of the Fairfax County legislative delegation, arranging for department heads and other county staff to provide testimony before committees or working with staff of other local governing bodies. "The county tries to coordinate its efforts with the other governing bodies," said Mittereder. "Working through organizations such as the Virginia Association of Counties also gives some collective weight to our voice, especially with Chairman Connolly as the outgoing president, and three of our other board members currently on VACo's Board of Directors."

Fridays bring the team back to Fairfax to report to the board's legislative committee on the week's events and to receive "marching orders" from the board. These meetings serve as a complement to the board's own partici-

pation in the legislative process. Connolly noted, "Advocating on behalf of our residents is a hands-on, interactive process." Board members meet annually with the delegation to present the county's legislative program, and hold a reception meeting during the General Assembly to discuss current legislation. In addition, board members serve on regional commissions and authorities throughout the year, and frequently meet individually with members of the delegation.

A key date in Richmond for the board will be Thursday, Feb. 9, when the Virginia Association of Counties and the Virginia Municipal League co-sponsor their annual Legislative Day at the General Assembly. The event will provide board members the opportunity to meet with local government officials from across the state as well as with the nine senators and 17 delegates who form Fairfax County's legislative delegation. Included in the day's agenda is an update by these organizations on legislation affecting local governments. In addition, the trip will include an on-site briefing for the board from the county's GR staff.

With a substantial package of initiatives, the Richmond team will

head to the state capital in January. Stay tuned for an update on the legislative session and its results in a future edition of *Courier*. ■

Board's Legislative Committee

- ♦ Committee of the full board.
- ♦ Chairman Connolly is legislative chairman.
- ♦ Works with county executive and government relations staff to compile the annual legislative program.
 - ♦ During the General Assembly, meets every Friday with GR and other county staff to assess progress of the legislative program and take positions on legislation of interest to the county.
 - ♦ Chairman and board host annual meetings with Fairfax County's legislative delegation before and during the General Assembly.

- ♦ Fairfax County's 2006 Legislative Program: www.fairfaxcounty.gov/government/board/2006legisprogram.pdf
- ♦ Virginia's Legislative Information (bill tracking) System: <http://leg1.state.va.us/lis.htm>
- ♦ The Virginia General Assembly Web site: <http://legis.state.us/homepage.html>
- ♦ Governor Warner's Web site: www.governor.virginia.gov

Toastmasters, from page 1

the B-2 Toastmasters Club that meets at noon in the Herrity Building twice a month (see box). "Toastmasters is an excellent way a person can learn to communicate better and to feel more confident about their abilities," said Hannan.

Brendan Ford, GIS/Mapping, has been a member of Toastmasters for almost 10 years and is a winner of several competitive speaking awards. Ford said, "Toastmasters teaches a person how to organize their thoughts quickly and feel comfortable before an audience."

A Toastmasters group, like one of the four county-supported groups, is orga-

nized along standard procedures so a person attending a different group will find similarities. Meetings are usually about an hour long, making employee attendance feasible. At a typical meeting, several members will give certain required speeches, such as informative, persuasive or humorous. Speakers are judged on how well they accomplish their objectives and follow the established guidelines. "Members learn how to stay within their allotted time, how to use positive body language, how to effectively use visual aids and, of course, how to speak well," said Hannan.

After each speech, evaluators critique each speaker, noting strengths and suggesting ways the speaker could improve. "Evaluation and criticism are always very positive and constructive," said Ford, pointing out that the role of the

evaluator is often as important as that of the speaker.

Following the scheduled speeches and before evaluations, a member who is the



Gary Oswald, DTA, speaks at the B2 Toastmasters.

"Table Topic Master" introduces topics and calls on other members for short, impromptu speeches. "This is a great way to improve your ability to quickly organize your thoughts and respond with a convincing presentation," Ford said.

Members who meet organization requirements, such as service and numbers of speeches, qualify for specific designations. For example, a person completing 10 required speeches qualifies as a "Competent Toastmaster." Additional commitments and work, such as serving in leadership positions at various levels, can qualify a member as a "Competent Leader." "Advanced Toastmaster" (gold, silver, bronze levels) is obtained by meeting additional speaking requirements. "Distinguished Toastmaster," the highest category, requires service as a governor and has been attained by **Leora Motley**, Financial Management Branch, DPWES.

People are welcome to attend one of the meetings and see first-hand how Toastmasters functions. This is a valuable resource for county employees willing to make a commitment. As Ford points out, "You get out of it what you put into it. It's definitely a 'relational' thing." If you would like more information about joining one of the county government-sponsored Toastmasters groups, please contact the Department of Human Resources or the key person indicated for one of the four groups (see box). ■

County-supported Toastmasters groups

All In The Family

Location: Government Center
When: 1st and 3rd Wednesday
Time: 12:15 to 1:15 p.m.
Contact: Charles Hodge,
703-324-4817, TTY, 711

B-2 Toasters Club

Location: Herrity Building
When: Thursday before payday
Time: Noon to 1:30 p.m.
Contact: Denis Hannan,
703-324-1753, TTY 711

Seven Corners Toastmasters

Locations 6245 Leesburg Pike, Suite 305, Falls Church
When: 2nd and 4th Thursday
Time: Noon to 1 p.m.
Contact: Ro Pauline,
703-787-4991, TTY 711

South County Communicators

Location: South County Government Center
When: 2nd and 4th Tuesday
Time: Noon to 1 p.m.
Contact: Susan Huppert,
703-704-6072, TTY 711

Start the new year with the county's new look

2006 begins with a new look for Fairfax County. January is the deadline to implement the standards and policies for the Fairfax County Communication Strategy. To help facilitate the implementation this month, listed below are links to

January is the deadline to implement the standards and policies for the Fairfax County Communication Strategy.

all of the standards and policies included in the strategy.

A number of modifications have been made to the strategy based on feedback from employees. Beginning in January, the county will use "The Gregg Reference Manual" for business writing and the Associated Press (AP) style for news releases and publications, such as brochures and newsletters. Agencies can register at no cost for the online AP Style Book by calling the Office of Public Affairs. Other modifications to the strategy include:

- ♦ The business card template has been modified so that information can be printed on both sides using larger type for those agencies whose primary customer is a senior resident or who may be visually challenged.
 - ♦ Agencies can add addresses, a logo, the agency's vision or mission statement on the stationery below the line at the bottom of the page - whatever you would like to add to distinguish your agency.
 - ♦ Agencies that represent more than one jurisdiction or are affiliated with the state can request exceptions through the Office of Public Affairs. Contact OPA to request exceptions.
- On Tuesday, Jan. 31, a meeting will be held to review Phase I of the Communication Strategy and introduce the new resources available as

part of Phase II. The meeting will be held from 2 to 4 p.m. in Rooms 9/10 at the Government Center. County employees are invited to attend.

The Strategy also offers a variety of resources for county agencies.

♦ You can request help with communication and outreach programs by using the Request for Communication Assistance form found at infoweb/cex/commstrategy/resources/requestform.htm.

♦ As we battle winter weather in the coming months, information about the county's inclement weather plans and policies is available at infoweb/cex/commstrategy/emergency/default.htm.

♦ And there is a reference library available at infoweb/cex/commstrategy/resources/references.htm that includes 15 articles about media relations, speech writing and crisis communication - with more on the way.

If you have any questions about the strategy or need help creating your agency's templates, contact the Office of Public Affairs at commstrategy@fairfaxcounty.gov or at 703-324-3187, TTY 711, for assistance. ■

Find the Communication Strategy on the Infoweb at <http://infoweb/cex/commstrategy/>

New Standards and Policies Included in the Strategy

Business Cards – http://infoweb/cex/commstrategy/standards/business_card.htm
 Letterhead – <http://infoweb/cex/commstrategy/standards/letters.htm>
 Memorandums – <http://infoweb/cex/commstrategy/standards/memos.htm>
 Fax Cover Sheets – http://infoweb/cex/commstrategy/standards/fax_cover_sheet.htm
 News Releases, Printed and Electronic (e-mail) – http://infoweb/cex/commstrategy/standards/news_releases.htm
 Official Typefaces – <http://infoweb/cex/commstrategy/standards/typefaces.htm>

Existing Standards That Have Been Consolidated Into the Strategy

Voice Mail Standards – <http://infoweb/cex/commstrategy/standards/voicemail.htm>
 E-mail Standards – <http://infoweb/cex/commstrategy/standards/email.htm>
 Publications Standards – <http://infoweb/cex/commstrategy/standards/publications.htm>
 Use of County Seal – <http://infoweb/cex/commstrategy/standards/seal.htm>
 Use of ADA Statements – <http://infoweb/cex/commstrategy/standards/statements.htm>
 Use of TTY Telephone Numbers – <http://infoweb/cex/commstrategy/standards/tty.htm>

Tax News

To avoid delays in receiving your W-2, ensure your address in Online TIME is correct.

W-2s will be mailed in January

Your W-2 form will be mailed to the address that is in Online TIME. Use transaction 005 in TIME to make changes or ask your agency payroll contact to change it for you.

Pay period 26 (Jan. 6 pay date) is the first pay disbursement (direct deposit or check) for tax year 2006 income tax purposes. The Social Security (OASDI) tax rate remains at 6.2 percent and the Medicare tax rate remains at 1.45 percent (total FICA tax rate 7.65 percent). The 2006 taxable wage base for Social Security has increased to \$94,200.

Federal income tax withholding has decreased due to the increase of the annual personal exemption amount from \$3,200 to \$3,300 and increases in the annual standard deduction amount for most filers.

There are no changes in state income tax withholding for Virginia, West Virginia or Pennsylvania. Fairfax County no longer withholds taxes for Delaware residents. Tax withholding rates and salary limits for resi-

dents of the District of Columbia have been reduced for tax year 2006. The salary limits for Maryland have been fine-tuned in PRISM and may result in an increase in the withholding of Maryland state taxes. St. Mary's County reduced its withholding rate from 7.8 to 7.75 percent. No other Maryland localities changed their tax rates.

The beginning of a new tax year is a good time to review your filing status (married or single), exemption allowances (zero or more) or exempt status. Your current filing status and number of exemptions is at the top right corner of your pay advice. You can change the information in Online TIME (transaction 005) or submit a new tax withholding form to the Payroll Division in the Department of Human Resources. Federal and state tax withholding forms are available from your agency payroll contact, the Department of Human Resources, Government Center, Suite 258, or on the Infoweb at <http://infoweb/hr/payroll/forms.htm>. ■

Focus on Benefits

New benefits deductions start today

Employees who have made changes to their benefits during open enrollment should check deductions in today's paycheck to

ensure that they are correct for the 2006 plan year. The 2006 biweekly deductions for health and dental insurance are listed below

2006 Health/Dental/Life Rates

Employee Biweekly Share		Employee Biweekly Share	
FairChoice+BlueChoice		Delta Dental	
Individual	\$33.91	Individual	\$7.26
2 Party	\$111.08	2 Party	\$13.71
Family	\$163.37	Family	\$22.59
BluePreferred PPO		Monthly Group Term Life Rates	
Individual	\$39.00	AGE	Per \$1,000 coverage
2 Party	\$127.74	Under 30	\$0.09
Family	\$187.87	30-49	\$0.17
Kaiser		50-59	\$0.31
Individual	\$24.88	60-79	\$0.49
2 Party	\$80.85	Monthly Dependent Coverage Premium	
Family	\$120.24	Low option (\$6,250/\$2,500)	\$2.50
CIGNA		High Option (\$12,500/\$6,250)	\$5.00
Individual	\$26.89		
2 Party	\$87.42		
Family	\$130.45		

as well as the monthly group term life insurance rates for optional and dependent coverage. Flexible spending account deductions for 2006 also begin today and will be taken over 24 pay periods this year. If your deductions are incorrect, please make any changes as soon as possible by calling HR Central at 703-324-4900, TTY 703-222-7314 or e-mail HRBenefits@fairfaxcounty.gov. ■

Briefs

Briefs

Christmas Tree Recycling

Fairfax County collection customers can place their trees at the curb during the first two weeks of January. All lights, ornaments and stands must be removed from the trees prior to pickup. After that time period, customers must schedule a brush pickup to have trees removed.

County residents with private trash removal services should arrange with their service to take trees away or take trees to the I-95 Landfill, 9850 Furnace Road, Lorton, or the I-66 Transfer Station, 4618 West Ox Road, Fairfax. There will be a disposal fee of \$1 per tree or \$30 per ton for Christmas trees delivered to these locations. Christmas trees are

ground up for mulch, which is then made available to residents free of charge at the county's mulch sites.

For more information on Christmas tree recycling, please call the Division of Solid Waste Collection and Recycling at 703-324-5052, TTY 711.

Interviewing for Employees Training — New Dates Set

Get some tips at the "Interviewing for Employees" class offered by the Employment Division, Department of Human Resources. This class provides information and suggestions for prospective interviewees. Two new sessions have been scheduled: Wednesday, Jan. 25, and

Wednesday, March 15. The classes will begin at 9 a.m. and end by noon. All sessions will be held in the Government Center, Suite 170, 12000 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax. To sign up, simply register for Class Code INTV 100 through your agency's training coordinator. Space is limited and demand for this class has been heavy. For more information or reasonable ADA accommodations, contact Sharon Hackett at 703-324-3394, TTY 703-222-7314. ■

For weather delays:
703-324-7669
703-246-7669

DFS Diversity Fair brings people together

Once again the Hispanic/Latino Ambassador Group sponsored a cultural training event similar to the one held last year. The DFS event, held on the second floor of the Pennino Building on Friday, Dec. 16, presented in a festive atmosphere the cultural and ethnic customs of the different countries represented by diverse county staff. An entertainment program featured at noon included Bolivian

folk dances, the Hora, African drum playing and the County Carolers.

Fourteen ethnic groups/countries had exhibits: Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, India, Italy, Jewish culture, Kenya, Mexico, Kwanzaa, Panama, Peru, Puerto Rico and the Philippines.

favorite foods and the ambiance created by the presentations.

The Hispanic/Latino Ambassadors group was formed to encourage understanding and to educate each other about the similarities and the differences within and between our cultures. Members of the founding group are **Rosa Suau, Ina Fernandez, Everludis Lopez, Alec Garit, Magda Alarcon, Angie Carrera, Maria Elena Martinez, Carmen Lilley, Stefani Takushi** and **Lucy Fletcher**. Membership is open to all staff who would like to share, discuss, explore and learn from each other about the different cultural values, customs and beliefs of staff and in our communities. Other activities sponsored by the group are monthly discussions on topics of interest such as "How Do I Identify Myself," "The Role of Bilingual Employees in Fairfax" and "Designated Roles by Gender." ■



Country crafts were exhibited.

What better way to learn and celebrate than through a yearly gathering of staff while experiencing the actual aromas and tastes of



Attendees enjoyed good food.

Security & Safety

Matters

Winter heating tips

Portable heaters and fireplaces make life comfortable during the winter season. However, they also are a potential cause of fires and burns, and must be used with extreme caution. Here are some tips to stay safe during the winter season from the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department.

Portable Space Heaters

- ♦ Use a heater that has been tested to the latest safety standards and certified by a nationally-recognized testing laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL). These heaters will have the most up-to-date safety features, such as automatic shut-offs. It is important to install and use heaters according to the manufacturer's recommendations.
- ♦ Place heaters at least three feet away from anything combustible,

such as newspapers, bedding, clothing and draperies. Place the heater on a level and nonflammable surface.

- ♦ Never leave heaters operating when you are not in the room and never leave children or pets unattended with space heaters in use.
- ♦ Kerosene heaters must be used with extreme caution, as kerosene is a flammable fuel.
- ♦ Use the type of kerosene recommended by the heater's manufacturers. Never substitute another fuel for a heater designed to burn kerosene.
- ♦ Refuel outdoors, and only after the heater has cooled completely.

Fireplaces

- ♦ Have a qualified professional inspect flues and chimneys before each heating season.
- ♦ Open the fireplace damper before lighting the fire and keep it open

until the ashes are cool. Never close the damper if ashes are still warm.

- ♦ Never use gasoline, charcoal lighter or other fuel to light or relight a fire.
- ♦ Fireplaces should have a sturdy screen or enclosure across the front to prevent embers from flying or logs from rolling out.
- ♦ When clearing ashes from the fireplace, be sure to put them into a metal container with a lid – never into a cardboard box or paper bag. Embers are capable of smoldering for days and may ignite.

Please contact **Robert Johnson**, safety analyst, Risk Management Division, Department of Finance, at 703-324-3043, TTY, 711, or e-mail robert.johnson@fairfaxcounty.gov, if you have any questions regarding winter related safety issues. ■

NVCC president to speak at January Millennium Forum

Dr. **Robert Templin Jr.**, president of the Northern Virginia Community College, will discuss the impact of the immigrant population on workforce development in Fairfax County at the Jan. 18 Millennium Forum, from 10:30 a.m. until noon in the Board Auditorium of the Fairfax County Government Center, 12000 government Center Parkway. ■




2005 Onthank nominations due in February

Feb. 28 is the deadline for nominations for the 2005 A. Heath Onthank Memorial Award, recognizing accomplishments of outstanding worth in advancing and improving public service in the county government during 2005. Recipients will be recognized at a Board of Supervisors meeting in June and will receive a plaque and a \$2,000 award.

The award is open to merit employees of Fairfax County government, and to unified scale and food service employees of the Fairfax County Public Schools. Nominees must have completed their initial probationary period. Nominations may be made by fellow employees or citizens.

Nomination forms are available

from members of the Board of Supervisors, department heads and the Department of Human Resources. For more information, contact **Robert Fitzpatrick** at 703-324-3306, TTY 711, or e-mail at Robert.Fitzpatrick@fairfaxcounty.gov.



Courier is published each payday Friday. The deadline for articles and notices is two weeks before publication.

Office of Public Affairs
12000 Government Center Parkway, Suite 551
Fairfax, VA 22035-0065

John Nash, editor
703-324-3197, john.nash@fairfaxcounty.gov
E-mail courier@fairfaxcounty.gov
FAX 703-324-2010
TTY 703-324-2935

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